

News

**Ethnic mini-cities on rise, StatsCan study finds; Immigrants settle in enclaves Concerns raised about isolation**

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Ethnic areas grow

Recent immigrants are increasingly likely to settle in ethnic neighbourhoods in Canada's three biggest cities, raising concerns that they are becoming isolated from the rest of the community.

Statistics Canada reported yesterday that the number of ethnic neighbourhoods in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver - where more than 30 per cent of the population is from a particular ethnic group - jumped from six in 1981 to 254 in 2001.

The study maps out an "isolation index" showing where immigrants are least likely to meet people from outside their own visible-minority group.

"Residential concentration of minority groups may result in social isolation and reduce minorities' incentives to acquire the host-country language or to gain work experience and educational qualifications," the study warned.

In 2001, 73 per cent of Canada's 4 million visible minorities lived in the three cities. About one-third of them came here during the 1990s, one-third arrived before 1991 and the rest were born in this country.

According to the study, there were only six ethnic enclaves in Canada's three largest metropolitan cities in 1981, but the number jumped to 77 in 1991 and 254 in 2001. Statistics Canada defines a visible-minority neighbourhood as one where more than 30 per cent of the population is from a particular ethnic group.

Among the 254 enclaves identified in 2001, 157 were Chinese, 83 were South Asian and 13 were black.

Toronto and Vancouver have many more visible-minority neighbourhoods, with 135 and 111, respectively, than Montreal, with eight.

The StatsCan study used an isolation index to measure the "probability that a member of a visible-minority group will meet only members of the same group in a particular neighbourhood."

It found that Chinese immigrants in Greater Toronto had an isolation index of 25 per cent in 2001, more than double that of 10 per cent in 1981. The index for their counterparts in Vancouver also increased, from 18 per cent to 33 per cent, during the same period.

The same trend was evident for Greater Toronto's South Asian community, whose isolation index rose from 6 per cent to 20 per cent in the last two decades.

In Vancouver, the group's index went from 7 per cent to 25 per cent in the same period.

Teresa Cheung, a Toronto litigation lawyer, said she moved out of North York to Markham four years ago in part because most of her family and relatives had moved to the area.

But it wasn't an easy decision, she said.

"I understand the issues (of ethnic concentration) and I weighed those issues.

"There are always concerns that it would perpetuate racial stereotypes," said the 33-year-old, who came to Canada with her family when she was 5 years old.

"There are impressions that (people living in enclaves) do not integrate as quickly, but the convenience for newcomers to live in those neighbourhoods actually outweighs the disadvantages.

"It's just easier for them to adapt."

In the Toronto area, most of the Chinese neighbourhoods are found in Scarborough, Markham and Richmond Hill, and less than 10 per cent of Chinese enclaves are in the old Chinatowns east and west of the downtown core. South Asian neighbourhoods are scattered over East York, North York, Scarborough, Mississauga and Brampton, while blacks are concentrated in Etobicoke and North York.

Cheung said many immigrants choose to settle where the jobs are, and a lot of highly educated Chinese immigrants relocated to Markham and Richmond Hill because of the high concentration of high-tech jobs in those communities.

Usha George, director of Canada's Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, said ethnic minorities congregate in enclaves for reasons that include family ties and community bonds.

New immigrants could also be restricted to poor neighbourhoods with affordable housing since they are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in their new community, she said.

"For a lot of them, the congregations in certain neighbourhoods are not by choice. Most of them are forced to do it," said George, who is also a professor in the University of Toronto's social work department.

"It should raise some concerns to our policy-makers. The society would be further segmented if the gap between these communities keeps widening."

Lucia Lo, a York University professor in economic and demographic geography, said the settlement pattern reflects the changes in Canada's immigration policy in the past two decades.

"Today, our immigrants are very different from those we used to get in the old days. They are much better educated. When they move to Canada, they don't restrain themselves to the dirty, filthy and crowded downtown ghettos," Lo said.

"They want to live in a house with a full backyard in the suburbs.

"They may still congregate in certain areas, but they do spread outside of the city core.

"And with the massive number of people coming to the country, we are seeing more ethnic neighbourhoods everywhere."

Lo said the isolation index is only one way to look at the integration level of different ethnic groups, but it is not necessarily the best indicator. Most people, she added, do interact with people outside their ethnic community, whether it's at work or in school.

"Looking at the residential concentration by itself doesn't really give you the complete picture of how well someone is integrated (in) and assimilated with the general community."

Dr. Joseph Wong, a founder of the Harmony Movement, a not-for-profit group that promotes racial tolerance and respect, called the isolation index a "misnomer."

The high concentration of certain ethnic groups in a neighbourhood is primarily due to the significant influx of immigrants overall into Canada rather than the increased concentration of a group, he said.

Ethnic enclaves have often been frowned upon and raised fear among those in the "mainstream" community of a takeover by visible minorities, Wong said.

In the early 1980s, the development plan of the first Chinese shopping mall in Scarborough raised concerns among local residents, he said, and it was just about eight years ago that former Markham councillor Carol Bell created an uproar by criticizing the proliferation of Chinese malls in the town.

"It is actually a good thing when you have an increase in a group's share in the city population, so it becomes a fact of life to learn to deal with people from all backgrounds with respect and tolerance," Wong said.

The Statistics Canada report also found that visible-minority neighbourhoods are more likely to experience higher unemployment and lower income levels than other neighbourhoods.

In Toronto, the unemployment rate rises from 5.7 per cent in neighbourhoods where less than one-tenth of the population is Chinese to 7.1 per cent where the Chinese account for at least half of the community.

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